

3.0 PLANNING CONCEPT (*italics represent changes to current plan*)

3.1 The Nature of Tiverton: Issues and Opportunities

Tiverton is in a time of change, more today than ever before in its history. Physically, the town is changing from a tidy rural New England town into a more suburban community. Tiverton's residents are also changing from a population with deep roots in the community, whose livelihoods were based on fishing and farming, to a growing newly arrived population whose jobs take them outside the town. Development is increasing, as have pressures on the remaining open space and historic buildings.

Tiverton faces a number of development issues, many of which were identified in the comprehensive plan workshops. Some of these concern the day-to-day operation of the town. Others have to do with the basic structure of land use and *future* physical development. The Comprehensive *Community* Plan focuses on those issues, as well as opportunities that relate to the present and future character, and the improvement of the community and its resources.

The special character of Tiverton is derived from the interrelationship among the basic functions and unique qualities of the community. This *special character* forms the conceptual basis for the Comprehensive *Community* Plan. These are the aspects of the town that will continue into the long-term future and should be reinforced through this planning effort. Four basic functions can be identified: a **unique environment**, a **waterfront town**, a **residential community**, and a **location for business opportunities**.

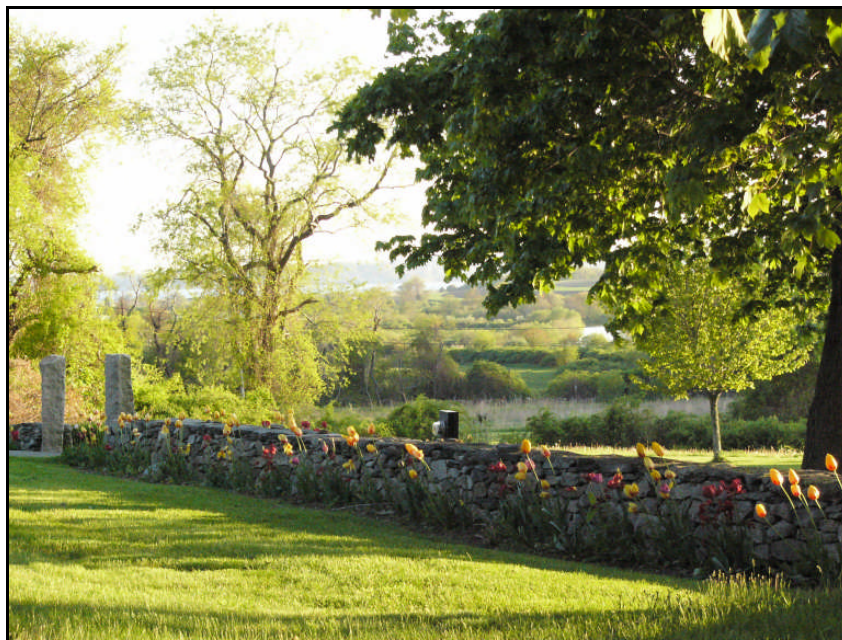
A Unique Environment

The location of the town, its historical development, and the quality of its natural features are unique factors of Tiverton today and will affect the character of Tiverton tomorrow. The conservation of those natural and historic features is crucial if Tiverton is to maintain its integrity and avoid becoming a faceless suburb.

The following are the major issues and opportunities that *constitute* this unique environment:

- **Ground and Surface Water:** Since the lifeblood of the community, the drinking water supply, comes from resources within the town, the protection of those resources is of crucial importance. Stafford Pond, one of the area's *major* public water resources, faces a *continuing* contamination *threat* from failed septic systems and recreational use. Both the quality of the current supply and potential sources for future water need to be protected. The administrative structure of existing water districts, and the ownership and use of watershed land are also issues. The need to *continue* a public education program on environmental protection has been identified as *crucial in dealing with these issues, as are specific steps such as a program for the inspection and maintenance of septic systems within the watershed.*

- **Wetlands:** Wetlands play an important role in the community for flood control and water storage, and as wildlife habitat. They are among the predominant natural features of the town, and monitoring the enforcement of existing wetlands protection regulations is an important concern.
- **Solid Waste Management:** Although the town landfill solves the immediate problem of solid waste disposal, the town must consider future alternatives. *A committee appointed by the Town Council is exploring the possibility of extending the life of the landfill by expanding its acreage. If the existing landfill is to remain open for its potential life, additional funding will be required. An alternative is to close the landfill and replace it with a transfer station. In addition, the Firestone Dump on Brayton Road has been identified as a possible Super Fund clean up site.*
- **Visual Quality:** *The visual quality of the town's commercial areas is a major concern. New construction of a chain retail building on Main Road in north Tiverton has led to demands that design standards be developed for additional commercial enterprises on the main commercial corridors in Tiverton. In 2005 the town initiated a design standards project to set building and site design criteria for new development in all commercial districts in town.*
- **Open Space/Farmland:** The loss of open space through development alters the character of the town. Additional open areas are needed in developed areas. Farmland is a special open space resource with both aesthetic and economic value to the town. *Farmers, particularly those with five to ten acres, will benefit from the assistance of a Small Business Association to identify available resources to survive and thrive in the agricultural community.*



Farms and fields contribute to Tiverton's unique environment

- **Historic and Scenic Character:** Tiverton's historic buildings and areas are the core of the town's character. Old buildings are particularly vulnerable to loss, yet the town has neither a regulatory nor an advisory mechanism for their preservation. *Tiverton has lost many historic sites and could lose more without the means to make their protection a priority. In the absence of historic district zoning, a historic preservation advisory committee composed of interested citizens could assist owners of historic properties.*

Many areas of Tiverton have a particular scenic quality derived from the rural landscape, such as mature trees, stone walls and rural roadways. The protection of these elements is a concern. These *irreplaceable* resources should be identified and protected. Future road and bridge improvements should be done with consideration of their rural location and character. Views from heights of land to the waterfront are particularly attractive and should be protected in future development. *The restoration of the Seapowet Bridge, using timber instead of concrete, and designed to a size acceptable to nearby residents, is an example of citizen input that should be replicated in future planning for infrastructure.*



Many of Tiverton's roadways are considered scenic

- **Recreational Resources:** While the town has several parks and recreation areas, many of these *have the potential to be better developed and utilized*. Small play areas should be located within areas of denser development. There are no walking paths to link these resources to the residential community. *There are some extensive trails systems, including those in Weetamoo Woods and Pardon Gray Preserve, and there have been some efforts to develop bikeways in town. While a proposal to establish a bicycle route along scenic roadways in southern Tiverton did not develop beyond the design study phase, the Department of Transportation has funded a pedestrian and bicycle enhancement project in the Stone Bridge area and along Main Road north to Riverside Drive. The Newport and Old Colony Railroad right-of-way remains viable for future use as a bikeway and pedestrian path.*

There is no comprehensive plan for implementing designated coastal rights-of-way. In addition, town beaches are used heavily by residents of Massachusetts and the Town Council has enacted higher non-resident access fees that can be used to fund improvements to these facilities.

A Waterfront Town

As a waterfront community, Tiverton has special problems and opportunities. The waterfront serves sometimes conflicting economic, recreational, environmental and historic functions. There are threats to the waterfront's character, including over-development, commercialization, excessive or inappropriate moorings and environmental degradation from a lack of enforcement of existing regulations. Tiverton's waterfront can be viewed as three areas: the scenic coastal bluffs and beaches *along the Sakonnet River*; the coastal marshes and ponds, such as Fogland, Seapowet, Nanaquaket and Nonquit; and the harbor basin at Stone Bridge and Bridgeport.

- Coastal and Environmental Resource Management: The scenic, natural coastline is a crucial element of Tiverton's character. The combination of beaches, shellfish beds and fishing areas, salt marshes and ponds serve to maintain the natural balance and function as *a natural and* economic resource for the town. The water quality of the Sakonnet River is a regional concern, which *is regulated by the state*. However, the town can *monitor* such local concerns as septic wash from riverfront homes and discharge from boats, silting around private docks, *and regulate use* of all-terrain vehicles (ATV's) *and jet skis, etc.*
- Harbor Management: The Tiverton harbor is a very special resource. The area functions as a beach, a mooring and dock site, a fishing ground, a location of homes, and a visual resource to the community. To enable these uses to coexist, the town has prepared a harbor management plan. *The plan identifies the urgent need to protect the harbor basin by reinforcing the Stone Bridge abutment in a visually attractive manner.*
- Waterfront Land Uses: *While much of Tiverton's waterfront remains an authentic mixed-use area with many waterfront dependent uses, there have been some significant changes since the Comprehensive Community Plan was first developed. The former oil tank farm north of the Sakonnet River Bridge has been dismantled, the site remediated and developed into the Villages on Mount Hope Bay, a 290 unit age restricted townhouse development with some commercial uses and a small marina. The Stone Bridge Inn was razed and replaced with a small commercial plaza. There is much interest in maintaining the small-scale integrity of the waterfront districts in the north part of town. In particular, the Stone Bridge Improvement Task Force developed plans to beautify the Stone Bridge area and make the harbor and shoreline more accessible. Also of interest is future public use of the Newport and the Old Colony Railroad right-of-way, which provides a waterfront corridor to Fall River.*



Fogland Beach is a popular site for swimming, fishing and boating

A Residential Community

Tiverton is and will remain a desirable place to live. Yet, the quality of the residential environment, and the availability of a range of housing for present and future generations, needs to be addressed. Major issues concern the preservation of existing housing, the types of housing provided, housing costs, the quality of town services *and the rate at which land is being developed into residential subdivisions.*

- **Housing Preservation:** The maintenance of existing units is a key concern in north Tiverton and the older areas of town. Also of concern is the maintenance and preservation of the historic and architecturally significant residential buildings located throughout the town.
- **Housing Variety:** Tiverton has developed as a suburban residential location, and the principal form of housing is the single family detached residence. While this housing is adequate for growing families, it can be burdensome for the elderly, small families, single person households and others. There is concern for increasing the variety of housing to serve residents in all stages of life, *although some progress has been made. In addition to low income elderly apartments on Hancock Street consisting of 96 subsidized units (see Housing Chapter), Tiverton now has two age restricted housing projects. One is the Villages on Mount Hope Bay, a high end development, and the other is Countryview Estates in northeast Tiverton, which will provide 269 manufactured homes, meeting a demand for moderately priced housing.*
- **Housing Costs:** *There remains a substantial gap between the cost of housing and the ability of most residents to pay. The town must confront the need to preserve existing low cost units, and provide for future housing affordability as well as a healthy range of types for residents seeking to move up in the housing market. In particular there is a strong need for affordable housing for families of low and moderate incomes.*

- **Community Services:** The town must provide services to support the residential community. The availability of public safety services and the quality of the school system has direct bearing on the desirability of the town as a residential location. There are logistical issues *to be addressed* concerning fire protection and ambulance services, *and the school system infrastructure*. Administrative issues related to town management led to the *creation of a position* for a full-time town administrator.

A Location of Business Opportunities

Tiverton serves as a location for neighborhood, community-oriented and family-owned businesses, and for a few small industries. The Bourne Mill is a testament to a previous industrial heritage that was linked to the historic mills in Fall River. Even today, commercial services and industry for the most part are provided by surrounding towns. Commercial development is located in few locations, along Main Road in north Tiverton, along the waterfront in Stone Bridge, and at several crossroads areas. Regional shopping centers are located in nearby communities. The majority of the town's workers are employed regionally. Most of the tax revenue in town is generated by residential uses with the burden disproportionately cast on an aging population.

Tiverton is well-located for commercial and industrial development and significant areas are zoned for general commercial or industrial uses. These areas have direct access to the regional transportation network. The lack of other infrastructure, particularly sewers, and natural features constraints are the major factors inhibiting these forms of development. *The Tiverton Economic Development Plan, which was completed in 2003, included a market analysis to identify opportunities for businesses in town, as well as a public outreach component during which residents expressed concern with the proliferation of commercial sprawl incompatible with the town's historic, rural and scenic character. The plan resulted in recommendations to balance economic development with protection of the town character and quality of life, including the development of commercial design standards for new development.*

- **Commercial Development:** The urban retail strip along Main Road in north Tiverton is generally underutilized and could benefit from *a revitalization plan*. The remaining commercial areas are characterized by strip development with confusing signage, numerous driveways and expansive parking areas. These features are not only unattractive, but decrease the efficiency of the roadways where they are located. *Comprehensive design standards are needed* to regulate the proper intensity of uses, provide visual buffers and other landscape features; *a commercial design standards project, including standards for building design, was underway in Tiverton in 2005.*
- **Industrial Development:** The Tiverton Industrial/*Technology* Park at the intersection of Route 24 and Fish Road offers the opportunity to generate jobs and *diversify* the tax base. A substantial area in north Tiverton is also zoned for industry, but is underutilized. Conflicts between industrial uses and the residential character of the *surrounding* area need to be resolved. A review of all industrial property needs to be conducted to optimize industrial development within the overall land use plan.

- Agriculture: The historic function of agriculture as a major economic endeavor has eroded in *the past few generations*. However, although farmland is being sold for housing developments, some residents still earn an income from agricultural activities. The protection and encouragement of this component of the local economy is important.



Main Road in north Tiverton is the location of many retail businesses

3.2 General Planning Goals

Goal 1:

Utilize the Comprehensive *Community Plan* as a guide to future growth and change within the town.

The citizens of Tiverton are justifiably proud of their town, and protective of the physical and social qualities, which characterize it as unique. Yet, there is considerable discussion of how the community should develop. Development pressures throughout the town are expected to continue. The town should leverage these pressures in a manner consistent with the common good, guided by the perspective of this Comprehensive *Community Plan*.

Goal 2:

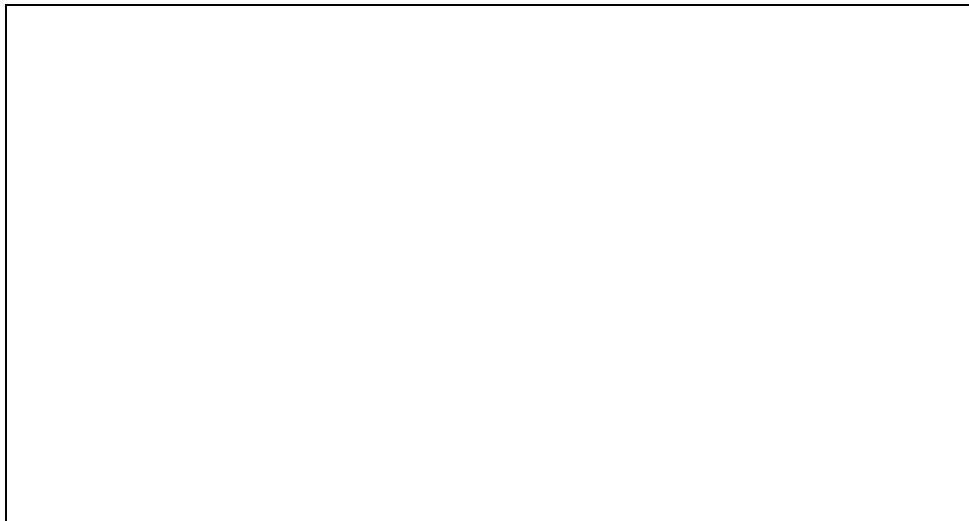
Promote unity within the town and encourage continued community participation in decisions concerning future development.

The comprehensive planning process has been the opportunity for citizens *from all areas of town* to identify common purposes in the town. The planning process used in the preparation of this Comprehensive *Community Plan* is a *positive example* of community representation and participation in decisions concerning planning and development in the town.

Goal 3:

Preserve and protect the intimate scale and character of the town as qualities that provide a *connection between the citizens and the businesses and government that serve them.*

The rural, small town character of Tiverton has been identified as one of its most important qualities. This character is not only reflected in the physical aspects of the community, but also in the close, person-to-person relationships of the people who live and work here, and the accessibility of the town's government to those governed.



The staff at Tiverton Town Hall works hard for the citizens

3.3 A Vision for Tiverton

It is the intent of *the Tiverton Comprehensive Community Plan* to present a vision for the future of the town, which combines opportunities for growth and change with the need for preservation of the essential characteristics of the community. This is an integrated vision for the town, and does not substitute for the more specific Future Land Use Plan found in Chapter 5 (*Figure 5-4*). The following is a description of major components of this plan:

- **Watershed Protection:** The protection of the sources of the town's water supply is a major concern. Protection areas should be reinforced around Stafford Pond and Nonquit Pond.
- **Residential Growth:** *Future residential growth, while providing for affordable housing opportunities throughout town, should consist of greater density and varying housing styles in north Tiverton, and less dense and rural residential style developments in south Tiverton.*

- **Commercial Area Refinement:** The utilization of the Main Road commercial area in north Tiverton should be improved by an active program of commercial revitalization. Other areas of commercial development should be inventoried and officially established. Development design standards should be prepared to improve the efficiency and appearance of the Main Road and other neighborhood commercial areas.
- **Rural Residential/Agriculture:** The rural character of south Tiverton should be preserved with low density residential, *developed according to the principals of conservation design*. Agricultural activities, which contribute to the economic base of this area, should be protected. *The Farm, Forest and Open Space taxation program is an important tool to encourage the preservation of open space.*
- **Contextual Development:** Compatible development which closely matches the existing historic and architectural fabric should be encouraged in *all areas of town, particularly* the areas of Stone Bridge, Nanaquaket, Puncateest/Fogland and Tiverton Four Corners. Techniques should be developed to encourage the preservation of existing buildings and to discourage demolition.
- **Industrial:** *Land zoned for industrial uses* should be developed in a high quality *manner* with adequate infrastructure and support services. Design guidelines should be produced for areas of commercial and industrial development.
- **Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** Environmentally sensitive areas are protected by state and federal regulatory systems. The town should monitor compliance as part of the subdivision review process.
- **Scenic Shoreline:** The natural features, beaches, cliffs and scenic vistas of the shorefront should be protected from over-development. Design standards to protect scenic values should be developed and included as a criterion for approval of developments.
- **Harbor Management:** The harbor management plan for the Tiverton Basin encourages the incorporation of water-dependent and related uses along waterfront land; *supportive land-side regulations and available parking should be pursued at the same time as the necessary physical improvements to protect the basin.*
- **Town Center:** The town should develop a new municipal center which consolidates many of the municipal functions inadequately housed in the existing town hall and other buildings. *The municipal center could incorporate a new town hall and library with public meeting space as well as a public safety complex. In 2004 the town completed the Tiverton Town Center Planning Study to guide the future development of underdeveloped land in the center of town.*

- **Open Space Network:** A comprehensive open space plan should be developed which includes recreation areas, conservation areas, a scenic roadway system and a bike-hike system.
- **Visual Buffers:** The natural landscape along Route 24 should be preserved as a visual buffer from future development. A protective buffer should be established between residential and commercial uses.
- **Sewer Connections:** *Sewer expansion should be restricted to existing developed areas of town where septic and cesspool systems are failing and where new individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS) are inappropriate because of soil type or lot size. Sewers should not be expanded merely to accommodate new subdivisions or the development of small lots that are not buildable due to ISDS constraints.*
- **Gateways:** Special design consideration should be given for transitional areas into the community. Five such "gateway" areas are *identified* - two in north Tiverton and three at the Route 24 exits. Secondary gateway areas exist at Bulgarmarsh Road from Westport and on the Main Road from Little Compton.
- **Rail Right-of-way:** The existing rail right-of-way of the Newport and Old Colony Railroad should be preserved for future use as a transportation and infrastructure corridor.



New residential development in Tiverton must include affordable homes

The following *chapters* elaborate on these concepts in the context of the goals, objectives and policies of the Tiverton Comprehensive *Community Plan*.